Barsauma

(d. 456)

BRIEFING

St. Barsauma (died 456) was a Syriac-speaking monk and holy man, a leading opponent of the Council of Chalcedon of 451. He is the subject of a biography in Syriac composed about a century after his death. He is regarded as a saint by the Oriental Orthodox. He is the subject of the *Life of Barsauma*, which was recently translated. Jacob of Serugh also composed a homily about Barsauma.

HAGIOGRAPHY

St Barsauma was a disciple of St Abraham of the High Mountain. Barsauma was responsible for the destruction of numerous temples and synagogues, both Jewish and Samaritan, between 418 and 423 (alternatively 419–422). According to ancient sources, when he visited the synagogue of Rabba (Areopolis), its doors miraculously opened, and the synagogue was set on fire. Looting was forbidden by Barsauma's order, and the synagogue burned to the ground. It is unclear if local Jews had converted to Christianity.

In 438, Barsauma and forty of his followers attacked Jews praying at the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem, killing many. He was tried, but claimed innocence, saying the stones were cast from heaven, and eventually acquitted.

In the Council of Chalcedon, he was accused by Bishop Diogenes of Cyzicus of killing Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople at the Second Council of Ephesus. According to Diogenes, a group of Barsauma's monks beat up Flavian while Barsauma cried "Strike him dead!". Flavian died of his injuries a three days later. The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon record that, when the bishops heard this, they exclaimed "Barsauma is a murderer, cast him out, out with him to the arena, let him be anathema".

VENERATION

He is commemorated in the Syriac Orthodox Church on the 3rd of February and in the Coptic Orthodox Church on the 9th of Amshir.